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ABSTRACT

Public schools in America are often at the center of controversy over conflicting values and interests. This paper explores three areas of conflict that surfaced in a Virginia community as it shifted from an appointed to an elected school board. The first section explores the three areas of conflict: (1) conflict over what is taught in school; (2) conflict regarding the operation of educational institutions; and (3) conflict surrounding the cost of public education. The second section reviews literature in the fields of sociology and political science that pertains to group theory and the political process. The third section tells the story of the Virginia county's first school board elections. The final section explores the activity of interest groups in the county and points to possible areas of change due to elected boards. Data were gathered through interviews with key members of local educational interest groups, recently defeated school board members, and recent school board candidates. The case illustrates how group formation reinforced Truman's (1951) understanding of group equilibrium, illustrates the role of interest groups in converting citizen demands into policy outputs, and shows how elections act as access channels to school policymaking. Members of certain interest groups believed that elected boards would be more responsive to their demands. Three tables are included. The appendix contains methodological notes. (LMI)

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Interest Groups and the Shift from Appointed to Elected School Boards

Introduction

> [T]here is a great war waged in America - but not on the battlefield of conventional weapons. This battle is for the heart and mind and the soul of every man, woman, and especially child in America . . . The battle is for the minds of our youth.[1]
>
> Robert L. Simonds
> Spokesman, National Association of
> Christian Educators

Public schools in America are often at the center of controversy over conflicting values and interests. Why? Because one of the major functions of schools is the dissemination of knowledge. Who gets to decide what knowledge is disseminated, therefore, becomes an issue of extreme importance. Another cause of controversy is that the schools, like other large organizations, face difficulties in motivating and managing employees. These difficulties often result in disputes between workers and administrators. Finally, schooling is an expensive venture. Citizens often raise questions concerning who should pay for schools and how much should be spent.

This paper explores these areas of conflict in one Virginia community as it shifts from an appointed to an elected school board. This change in school governance brings the democratic process under scrutiny. Is democracy the best means of governing our schools, or does it lead to domination by special interest groups? Is school politicization unavoidable or can people with disparate views work together for the common good? Alhtough this study does not answer these questions directly, it adds to our knowledge concerning the role of politics in education.

The first section provides a context for the research by exploring the three areas of conflict mentioned above: (1) conflict over what is taught in school; (2) conflict regarding the operation of educational institutions; and (3) conflict surrounding the cost of public education. This section demonstrates that the battles waged by interest groups over school issues are an enduring aspect of the educational landscape.

The second section reviews literature in the fields of sociology and political science that pertains to group theory and the political process. Interest group definitions, and reasons for group formation illuminate the behavior of special interest groups and their involvement in

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[1] From James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, (Basic Books, Harper Collins, 1991), p. 201.

politics. These theories suggest some possible outcomes for a community changing from appointed to elected school boards.

The third section tells the story of Burden County's first school board elections.[2] This section includes information about the social context of the community and important events leading up to the election. Little analysis is included in this section so that the narrative of Burden's inaugural school board race may be told in a chronological fashion.

To close, there is a discussion of the role of interest groups in Burden County's system of educational governance. This section explores the activity of interest groups in Burden County, and points to possible areas of change due to elected boards. The section also draws several tentative conclusions concerning behavior of interest groups under changing political conditions. The methodology of the study is described in the Appendix.

Section I

Types of Conflict in the Educational Arena

There is a great deal of debate over many issues involving the public schools. From school prayer to tuition tax credits, the public schools are often the focus of controversy. This section classifies conflict surrounding the public schools into three broad areas. The first area deals with conflict over the type of knowledge distributed through the schools; here, schools become the focus of groups trying to influence students into thinking and acting in particular ways. The second area involves conflict over the control of the operations of educational institutions. In this area conflict is both external and internal. An external conflict, for example, might involve members of the health community seeking to convince the school board to hire more health professionals for the schools. An internal conflict, on the other hand, might have less to do with the subject matter, and more to do with the relationship between teachers and administrators. The final area of conflict surrounding public schooling involves economic questions concerning who should pay for public schools and how much.[3]

If we assume that the things students learn at school have some influence on the decisions they make regarding political, economic, or moral issues, it becomes clear that groups with particular agendas will feel the need to involve themselves in shaping the overall character of public education. In his book, *Conflict of Interests* (1993), Joel Spring illustrates this point with several examples:

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[2]Burden County is the pseudonym used for the community under study.
[3] Joel Spring , *Conflict of Interests*, (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 1993), p. 25

> As major disseminators of knowledge, public schools are targets for a variety of groups trying to influence the values, ideas, and information disseminated to students. The history of public schooling in the United States is filled with religious objections to teaching evolution, sex education, and secular humanism and with demands that schools teach a morality based on religious values. Traditionally, unions and businesses have wanted schools to teach ideas that support their economic interests. Political leaders want the schools to teach political values that support their positions, while social crusaders want the schools to solve problems ranging from alcoholism to death on the nation's highways by instilling particular values and information in students.[4]

Spring makes the argument that these groups want their values and ideas injected into the public schools as a means of furthering their goals. However, these are not the only groups concerned with the ideas being taught. Consumers of education, such as individual parents or groups of parents, also participate in interest groups. Parental interest groups want the schools to provide an education that will enhance their children's opportunities in the labor market, and help them to protect their political and economic rights. An example of this type of demand is the struggle of dominated racial groups to have the schools recognize and serve their interests.[5]

With regard to conflict over the control of the operations of educational institutions, two types exist. The first is an external type of conflict closely related to conflict over the type of knowledge to be disseminated. In this type of conflict, groups in the community strive to influence the schools through the school board. For example, business groups are often concerned that students gain the skills necessary to become strong workers. To ensure this end, they may try to influence school boards to support a particular type of skill-oriented curriculum. Business groups also try to influence the schools more directly by establishing school-business partnerships. The second type of conflict over control is internal. Examples of internal conflicts are teachers' unions and school administrators battling over issues such as pay, job security, and professional autonomy. Such disharmony between these groups has led to initiatives like site-based management, which purports to share among teachers the power traditionally associated solely with the principal.[6]

The third area of conflict in schools deals with economic issues. The question of who should pay for public education is a long-standing one. Older people, who no longer have students in the school system, often want to hold down the cost of schooling while parents with school-age children would like to increase expenditures. Businesses, although they claim to support schools, often seek tax breaks which lower their overall contribution to the school

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[4] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 25.

system. Struggles also occur concerning inequities in the funding between poor and wealthy schools.

Although these examples are not exhaustive, they cover some of the major areas of conflict in public education. In order to solve these conflicts, political processes (elections, votes, etc.) are necessary. The result of conflict in the educational arena is an increase in the political nature of local school governance. This is an interesting development considering the many attempts made to separate educational governance from politics. The most notable of these attempts was the Municipal Reform Movement (1890-1920). The movement's purpose was to weaken the hold of corrupt politicians on city government and to separate education from what was perceived as "the evils of politics." The belief held by reformers at that time, according to Harmon Zeigler, Kent Jennings, and Wayne Peak, in their book *Governing American Schools* (1974) was that

> educating America's youth was much too sacred a rite to risk its perversion through practices which reformers believed characterized the world of politics . . . the task of public education could not afford to be subverted by the corruptive influence of politics.[7]

As a result of the movement, by the 1920s, schools were removed from the jurisdiction of general-purpose government. Elections for school board were held separately from regular government elections, and were generally non-partisan and at-large.

What is notable, considering the attempts to keep politics out of education, is the persistence of political debate and conflict in the educational arena. The next section of this paper discusses the consequences of highly politicized school environments. Special attention is paid to interest groups' attempts to influence the schools.

The increasingly politicized environment of schools

It seems clear from the previous discussion that schools are often at the center of conflict over issues that touch upon values, control, and economics. Seymour Sarason explores this topic in his recent work, *Parental Involvement and the Political Principle* (1995). In this book, he aptly depicts the tension between schools and the greater public:

> The public is dissatisfied with our schools, and educators are perceived as being resistant to change and concerned only with money and control and lacking a leadership capable of changing educational practices, organizational characters, *and the relationships with the larger community.* I italicize those words to emphasize a point . . . parents are no longer the only "external" group vitally concerned with what happens in school; politicians, legislators, the entities we call state and federal government,

[7] L. Harmon Zeigler, M. Kent Jennings, and G. Wayne Peak , *Governing American Schools,* (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1974), pg. 3.

> leaders of minority groups, business executives, and others seek to get into the act on the basis of their different purposes, agendas, and constituencies. As someone said, "If they are not taking dead aim at our schools, let us not forget that they have guns and they are in the rehearsal phase."[8]

Examples of political conflict in schools are everywhere. During the fall of 1994, in Albemarle County, Virginia, stories in the local paper highlighted conflict over the issue of book banning. Some members of the community felt that *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson was offensive due to Gilly's (the central character) struggle against religion and love. These parents asked the superintendent to remove the book from elementary school library shelves. Other community members were angry at the notion of removing a book from the library simply because a few people found it offensive.[9] In Hatfield, Massachusetts, the issue of condom availability in the public school, split the town along conservative and liberal lines, and gained national attention after *Harper's* published an account of the dispute in 1994.[10] These are just two examples in an inexhaustible list of school controversies. According to James Hunter, in *Culture Wars* (1991), it is easy to understand why the schools are often the focal point of such conflict,

> [i]t is because of the intrinsic link between public education, community and national identity, and the future (symbolized by children) that the institutions of education have long been a political and legal battleground. [11]

Along with home, church, and perhaps the media, the public schools persist as one of the primary organizations that provide civic education and socialization in our democracy. This is an important duty. Schools bind individuals together into communities and nations. Concurring with Hunter, Benjamin Barber notes:

> The logic of democracy begins with public education, proceeds to informed citizenship and comes to fruition in the securing of rights and liberties. . . Public schools are how a public—a citizenry—is forged and how young, selfish individuals turn into conscientious, community-minded citizens.[12]

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[8] Seymour B. Sarason, *Parental Involvement and the Political Principal*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), p. 17.

[9] Jim Dener, "'The Great Gilly Hopkins' Survives School Board Scrutiny", *The Daily Progress*, (October 11, 1994), p. A1.

[10] Anthony Giardina, "Fighting In The Schoolyard", *Harper's*, (April, 1994), pp. 57 - 66.

[11] Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[12] Benjamin Barber, "America Skips School", *Harper's* , Vol. 287, No. 1722 (November, 1994), p. 44.

Thus by virtue of what they symbolize (the future) and their role (the creation of citizens), schools hold special status in the community. This special status brings a great deal of scrutiny along with it.

The most obvious scrutiny comes from groups as they react to statements of school policy, or attempt to change the present orientation of the public schools. As discussed above, there are battles over the knowledge to be distributed in schools, as well as struggles over the control and funding of the school enterprise. The combination of all of these areas of conflict creates a contentious environment through which the schools must navigate. Here, Spring's words (1993) are again pertinent:

> The complex web of tensions, conflicts, and ambitions among elected politicians, educational politicians, interest groups, and the knowledge industry keeps the educational system in constant change and turmoil. One could argue that the major disease of the American education system is its constant propensity to change to serve the needs of various politicians and to solve economic and social problems. [13]

From this observation, one may begin to discern the effect of interest group activity on the public schools.

Interest groups are both a cause and an effect of politicized school environments. They are a cause when battling between well established groups makes the schools' mission unclear and difficult to carry out. They are an outcome when disagreement among community members over school issues results in the polarization of communities into groups that share certain attitudes and dispositions. Interest groups are one of the most alarming problems associated with school politicization because of the extent to which they may influence school governance. Examples of groups which vie for influence over the schools include: the business community, conservative groups, right wing religious organizations, taxpayer associations, liberal political groups, booster organizations, and teachers' unions. Business groups want the public schools to serve their needs by creating capable workers. Conservative and religious groups attempt to censor teachers, curriculum, and text books to ensure that their points of view dominate. Taxpayers associations aim to keep school expenditures under control while liberal groups my want the schools to tackle social issues such as racism. Booster organizations (e.g. PTO, Football Boosters, etc.) usually push for greater appropriations for school funding while teachers organizations want better wages and benefits.

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[13] Spring, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

These examples are troubling because they illustrate that the interests single issue groups may not necessarily be commensurate with the broader public interest.[14] The bias of some of these groups becomes apparent when their narrow agendas are juxtaposed with traditionally democratic notions of public education that depict schools as promoting the tenets of democracy and creating responsible citizens. If successful, narrowly conceived interests may shut out the greater public and create an orthodoxy of thought which threatens the perpetuation of democracy. Although this result may seem like an exageration, many political scientists would contend that narrowly conceived interests have dominated American politics for some time.[15] These political scientists view our system of government as an "elite" system where few actors make the decisions for many.

This picture, however, is far too bleak. There are also positive ways to view interest group involvement in school governance. In these conceptions, the participation of interest groups strengthens democracy because interest groups give citizens the opportunity to participate in governance.[16] Interest groups become the vehicle through which the populace makes its feelings on certain issues known. For example, on the subject of sex education, two groups may appear, one that supports sex education and one that denounces it. These groups might share similar amounts of influence, debate the issues, and work toward compromise. In this conception of government, sometimes called "pluralism", groups represent different ideas and philosophies. The continuous interplay of these philosophies serves as a "balance wheel" maintaining equilibrium in a complex and fragmented political system.[17]

With these considerations in mind, we now turn to some of the "classic" literature on group theory and the political process. This background provides a theoretical basis for understanding the events taking place in Burden County in the fall of 1995. The literature reveals that the activity of local interest groups may be effected as school governance structures (boards of education) change from appointed to elected status.

Section II

A Brief Review of the Literature

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[14] Public interest can be thought of as collective interests belonging to all or very large groups of citizens. For more detail see E.E. Schatsneider, *The Semisovereign People*, (New York: Rev. ed. Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press), p. 26.

[15] H. R. Mahood, *Interest Group Politics in America, A New Intensity*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 9.

[16] Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 217.

[17] H. R. Mahood, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

The purpose of this section is to draw on the literature of sociology and political science to illustrate how a changing governance structure might affect interest group activity. To do so, we must explore three questions regarding the group as a political concept. (1) What is an interest group? (2) Why do interest groups form? (3) How do interest groups exert influence in the governmental process?

What is an interest group?

Definitions of the term "interest group" differ markedly throughout the literature. Over the years, man's tendency to form groups has been characterized in many ways. This section explores various approaches to the interest group concept.

As early as 1787, James Madison was acutely aware of the power groups could have in the political process. He felt that the proclivity of individuals to form into groups is, "sown in the nature of man". [18] He called political groups *factions* and defined them as

> a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interest of the community.[19]

Since Madison's outlook toward these groups was negative, he attempted to set up safeguards against them. The system of checks and balances in federal government, for example, is designed to keep factions in check by keeping any single group from controlling every aspect of government.

This early observation is consistent with later studies by sociologists. John Dewey, for example, felt that human behavior should be considered within the context of an individual's associations, not in isolation. According to Dewey in his 1927 book *The Public and Its Problems*,

> The human being whom we fasten upon as individual *par excellence* is moved and regulated by his association with others; what he does and what the consequences of his behavior are, what his experience consists of, cannot even be described, much less accounted for, in isolation.[20]

In Dewey's understanding of society, groupings were primary and counted heavily in the determination of individual behavior. For Dewey, group norms defined the limits of individual behavior.

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[18] James Madison in David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 17.

[19] James Madison in Robert A. Heineman, *Political Science* (New York, NY: The McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 1996), p. 103.

[20] John Dewey in Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

David Truman exhibited sociological leanings similar to those of Dewey. Truman, author of *The Governmental Process* (1951), believed that interest groups are similar to other types of social groupings. Therefore, in order to understand interest groups, we first have to understand groups in general. From families to church choirs, groups are the primary means through which individuals experience and shape their world. Because groups are able to create and support patterns of behavior among their members, they are one of the most powerful socializing influences in society.

Although groups are powerful socializing agents, Truman also saw that members influence the character of their groups. One way that individuals influence their groups is by belonging to several at the same time. Individuals are always members of several groups simultaneously — family, religion, union, etc. These overlapping affiliations keep individuals from focusing their energy exclusively on one group; they also keep individuals from supporting all of the stated goals of any one group to which they belong. According to Truman, groups often respond to overlapping affiliations by tempering their demands instead of forcing their members to decide between conflicting loyalties. Thus, Truman's work suggests that groups both define and are defined by the individuals within them.

In defining the term "group", Truman asserted that groups are more than mere collections of bodies; they are patterns of interaction. In Truman's words,

> When men act and interact in consistent patterns, it is reasonable to study these patterns and to designate them by collective terms: *group, institution, nation, legislature, political party, corporation, labor union, family,* and so on.[21]

Members of groups follow similar patterns of interactions and display similarities in attitudes and beliefs.

These attitudes and beliefs are the basis of a group's interest when they pertain to what a group wants or needs.[22] These wants and needs are observable in the form of demands, or claims, upon other groups in society. If the group's claims are on the institutions of government, Truman called them political interest groups. In education, they are educational interest groups. His specific definition of interest group follows:

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 31

[22] Wants and needs are distinctly different. This is sometimes explained as the difference between apparent goods (things that we desire whether they are good for us or not) and actual goods (things that are truly good for us). For a more thorough discussion of real and apparent goods please see Mortimer Adler, *Six Great Ideas,* (New York: Collier Books, 1981), pp. 72-98.

> [A]ny group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared attitudes.[23]

This definition is advantageous for several reasons. One, it allows for the consideration of potential or latent as well as existing interest groups. A potential or latent group is a group of individuals who share common interests but have no formal organization — with the appropriate motivation, these individuals could coalesce into organized groups. Two, it allows for varying degrees of interaction among the members of a group. The greater the frequency of interaction, the more influence a group is likely to have on the behavior of its members.

Groups with little organization (potential or latent groups) are difficult to characterize, but still influence the behavior of decision-makers. Latent groups accomplish this influence by their presence alone. For example, politicians often try to avoid policy directions that run counter to what they see as "mainstream" values. Moves against the "mainstream" often encounter great resistance and are costly to the politician.

Organized groups, when compared to latent groups, are easier to characterize because they have distinct properties such as high degrees of stability and uniformity.[24] Well established, highly organized groups are often considered to be institutions. Courts, legislatures, and other political bodies are included in this category.[25] For our purposes, school boards, school district administrators, and well-established educational interest groups can be added. The members of these groups usually exhibit characteristic patterns of behavior which represent the *equilibrium* of the institution. According to Truman, "The interactions that make up the institutional group are normally in balance, or in a state of equilibrium."[26]

In closing, from the time of Madison we see an evolution of thought regarding interest groups. In Madison's writings, interest groups are considered to be bad for government. In Truman's work, they are seen as part of government. Truman's definition of the term "interest group" clarifies our understanding of the concept by recognizing the influence unformed groups might exert on government. His definition also recognizes the influence of highly organized groups, or institutions, and their ability to maintain equilibrium. Overall, Truman's definition of interest groups offers the most useful explanation of what a group is. For the reasons articulated above — its focus on interaction and flexibility regarding degrees of organization — Truman's definition is the one used in this paper. Now, we move from definitions of interest groups to the reasons behind group formation.

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[23] Truman, *op. cit.* p. 33.
[24] George A. Lundberg in Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[25] Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Why do interest groups form?

Although disagreement regarding the definition of interest groups is significant, explanations for their existence are even more diverse. Many authors offer reasons for group formation. Those reasons most relevant to this investigation are discussed here.

Pluralists, such as David Truman believed that interest groups emerge when they are needed. He felt that rational self-interested men band together when they realize that they have common interests and that they can benefit from collective action. Truman, for example, held that differentiation in society leads to specialization and, in turn, to the creation of diverse values. In a sea of diversity, similar values or interests are able to draw disorganized people (latent or potential groups) together. Patterns of interaction (equilibrium) between group members are established once organizations are formed.

Another cause for group formation comes from disruptions to an existing group's equilibrium. Truman observed that disruptions come from a variety of influences including changes in the business cycle or technological innovation. The result of these changes is often the emergence of conditions that favor some groups over others. Groups placed at a disadvantage attempt to restore the previous balance. In this process several typical behaviors can be observed. If the disturbance to the equilibrium is relatively small, leaders attempt to re-institute old patterns of interaction. If the disturbance is large, Truman predicts three typical reactions:

> In the first place, the participants may individually engage in various kinds of inappropriate or aberrant or compensatory substitute activities: complaining, rumor-mongering . . . Secondly, the disturbed individuals may increase their activities in other groups in order to restore some sort of personal balance. . .The third type of behavior that may result from a serious disequilibrium is the formation of new group that may function to restore the balance. For present purposes this type is the most important of the three, especially if a considerable number of individuals is affected, since these new groups are likely to utilize political means of achieving their objectives.[27]

New groups resulting from conflict are often political in nature. In other words, groups created under disadvantaged conditions are likely to focus their energies on influencing politicians and the institutions of government. Every group in Truman's model is striving to achieve stability.

This theory of group formation has at least one critical flaw. It predicts that groups always form when people are placed at some disadvantage. This prediction, however, is not always true. Disadvantaged populations are often unable to organize themselves into legitimate political entities. For example, the indigent have not developed organizations to represent their interests. In addition, groups often form under advantaged rather than

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

disadvantaged conditions. For example, English auto workers in England formed their first unions during periods of improving rather than worsening labor relations.[28]

In this vein, other scholars believe that there is more to group formation than disadvantage coupled with common interest. Robert Dahl, for example, observed that incentives might be necessary to prompt group formation. He wrote, "to build an effective coalition rewards must be conferred on (or at least promised to) individuals, groups, and various categories of citizens."[29] This idea was further articulated by Mancur Olson in *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), as the dilemma over public goods. The dilemma revolves around getting everyone to pay for the cost of goods that provide broad benefits to all members of society. For example, roads, schools, and national defense are often characterized as public goods. These goods are non-divisible and accrue to every member of society whether people pay for them or not. Because people can get the benefit of a good without paying for it, there is no incentive for people to pay. In the case of group formation, if an individual can get the same benefit as a group member without joining, why bother? This is known as the problem of the free rider.

Applying the theories of political science to the arena of local school governance, Laurence Iannaconne and Frank Lutz, co-authors of, *Politics, Power, and Policy: The Governing of Local School Districts* (1971), believed that the existence of local educational interest groups is linked to the absence of true two-party politics at the local level. In the traditional two-party system, people combine their interests under the "tent" of the party structure. Public debate on issues results in coalition building and compromise. This system, however, dominates only in the larger arenas of state and national elections. At the local level, particularly in the realm of education, local politics are often marked by an absence of overt public discourse in the forging of decisions. Instead, efforts are made to achieve consensus behind closed doors. As Iannacone and Lutz observed,

> School district politics tends to maximize the search for consensus and avoid open conflict, creating opportunities for the manipulation and control of school boards and educational policies by relatively small and narrowly based cliques.[30]

Without partisan politics, educational issues are not discussed openly and many citizens remain unaware of the issues at stake. Iannacone and Lutz claimed that this pattern is particularly true in the Southeast and quote Ralph B. Kimbrough for support in this area. According to

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[28] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 123.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[30] Laurence Iannaccone and Frank W. Lutz, *Politics, Power, and Policy: The Governing of Local School Districts*, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1970), p. 29.

Kimbrough, "Decisive power is exercised in most local school districts by relatively few persons who hold top positions of influence in the informal power structure of the school district".[31]

Finally, Zeigler, Jennings, and Peak, in their study, Governing *American Schools* (1970), pointed toward the existence of powerful interest groups in environments which are heterogeneous and unsupportive of the schools.[32] This is an understandable finding considering how difficult it is for elected school board members to represent large diverse populations through small governing bodies like school boards. The authors explained group formation by combining the work of Truman and Olson. They wrote,

> It is clear . . . that groups originate in response to unsatisfied demands on the part of potential group members. Although unsatisfied demands may be insufficient to stimulate group activity, they are functions of environmental change (proliferation) and unresponsive political systems (inability to restore equilibrium). Demands lie at the heart of interest group formation, even though groups ordinarily need an individual leader (entrepreneur) to channel unsatisfied demands.[33]

In this model, a leader is able to articulate certain unmet demands and act as a catalyst for group formation. This explanation is powerful because it addresses the problems associated with group formation at the same time that it recognizes the strength of common interest.

In summary, we find a variety of explanations for group formation and group non-formation ranging from disadvantage to fear. Zeigler, Jennings, and Peak provide the most useful explanation of group formation by showing groups originating in response to unsatisfied demands. Now, we turn to answering the most important question of all: How do interest groups behave?

How do interest groups exert influence in the governmental process?

Explanations of interest group behavior come from observation of interest groups and their activities. Most of the research in this area employs case study methodology, although some empirical research has also been performed. Overall, it has been shown that an interest group's activities revolve around its desire to influence decision-makers regarding particular issues. Interest group activity can be classified into the following categories: (1) educating members about the extent to which the group's agenda has been implemented and the existing courses of action; (2) representing interests to decision-makers by providing information and expertise; (3) acting as outlets for members to express hopes and frustrations; (4) helping to set the governmental agenda; and (5) acting as watch dogs during the process of implementing

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[32] L. Harmon Zeigler, M. Kent Jennings, and G. Wayne Peak , *op. cit.* , pp. 95-117.
[33] *Ibid.* , pg. 96.

government decisions.[34] These behaviors are observable at a various times throughout the decision-making cycle and are sometimes punctuated by special events such as elections.

One of the primary behaviors interest groups exhibit is the sharing of information with group members, or potential members. When sharing information interest group leaders utilize a variety of techniques including word of mouth, formal petitions, and advertising.[35] Word of mouth is useful in small groups where there is a great deal of face-to-face contact. Petitions are effective because they serve two purposes; they familiarize policy-makers with the group's issue and inform the general public about the group's platform. Advertising is another approach used by groups to communicate with the public.[36] Sometimes advertising is called propaganda because it uses the media (television, newspapers, radio) to sway public opinion in directions that favor the group. Some groups are better at this than others because their status and power give them currency with the public.

Sharing information with politicians and decision-makers is another activity in which interest groups take part. For example, group leaders often try to stress the expertise of the group on specific topics. This is an effective strategy for gaining access to decision-makers because representatives often need expert advice in order to make decisions in unfamiliar policy areas. When groups share information and expertise with decision-makers they also have the opportunity to cast their own interests in a positive light. Educating policy-makers allows groups to portray themselves and their missions as beneficial.

A third activity associated with groups involves providing forums in which individual members can express themselves. The environment at group meetings is often one of affirmation. Group members share patterns of activity and beliefs and, therefore, support each other in their efforts to influence governance and policy. At group meetings people are able to voice concerns and ideas that might meet harsh criticism if aired in the general public. The need for a supportive environment is particularly salient for small groups with unpopular ideas.

A fourth activity interest groups exhibit relates to their role in the agenda-setting process. In order to influence this process, groups must first have access to decision-makers. According to Truman, "toward whatever institution of government we observe interest groups operating, the common feature of all their efforts is the attempt to achieve effective access to points of decision."[37] If access is achieved — a feat which is difficult for groups with low status and little resources — shaping the agenda becomes a possibility. Agenda setting is achieved by showing support for a particular plan of action, or threatening to impede movement in a contrary direction. Even groups that do not enjoy high levels of access can often keep other

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[34] From conversation with political scientist Mathew Holden, 10/11/95.
[35] Truman, *op. cit.* pp. 223-245.
[36] *Ibid.* , p. 260.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

groups from pursuing their agendas. This ability to obstruct movement is known as the defensive advantage. The result of group participation in the agenda-setting process means that most legislative decisions involve the adjustment and compromise of interests.[38]

Finally, interest groups often watch the implementation of programs so that they do not deviate from their intended purpose. For example, when a community builds a new high school, tax-payers' associations may watch closely to see that the school system does not exceed budgeted expenditures. In this example, groups monitor projects and blow the whistle when the projects do not follow pre-determined agreements.

The activities outlined above are general activities in which interest groups take part on a day-to-day basis. Elections, held episodically, offer groups another means of gaining access to decision makers. Truman felt there were three activities which characterize interest group activity around election time: (1) supplying members with information regarding the reputation, records, and promises of the candidates; (2) contributing both money and time to the candidate whose slate best matches group interests; and (3) helping "get out the vote" in support of a particular candidate. [39]

With regard to supplying information, nominees are often asked to commit to certain policies which the endorsing group supports. In addition, candidates are often given written questionnaires or a personal interviews which are then publicized to group members. Groups may or may not endorse candidates but they often make their members aware of candidates' positions. Avoiding official endorsement usually is only an attempt by interest groups to be polite and keep "politics" out of the process. Truman has suggested that endorsing activities might not provide tangible benefits to the group because they do not insure access to the decision-makers after the election.

A more profitable approach of gaining access, according to Truman, is for groups to help candidates with time and money. Group members who involve themselves by helping to organize campaigns, go door to door for the candidate, or give money to support the campaign improve their chances of being heard. These types of activities create an indebtedness on the part of the candidate to the group for providing important services. As a result, interest groups develop close relationships with politicians and have the opportunity to voice their concerns.

The final activity of groups at election time has to do with voting. Groups may or may not vote in a disciplined manner. The more cohesive a group, the more likely group members are to vote for the groups' candidate. However, group cohesion is hard to gauge and, therefore, it is difficult to determine how many members of a group will vote one way or another.

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 392.
[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 304-305.

In summary, we see that interest groups are motivated to gain access to decision-makers. For interest groups, the process of gaining access is facilitated by maintaining public support for their interests and plying decision-makers with resources such as money, expertise, and votes. Truman's work shows groups to be one of the most important elements in the political arena.

Potential Outcomes For Communities Undergoing Governmental Change

As Virginia communities change from appointed to elected school boards, many questions remain unanswered concerning the activity of educational interest groups. Will the activities of educational interest groups change? If they change, in what ways will they change? Based on the previous discussions of "classic" interest group theories, there are several possible answers to these questions. This section discusses some of the changes in interest group behavior that may occur as localities switch from appointed to elected school boards.

To begin, it is likely that we will see more of the same. In other words, the behavior of educational interest groups will not be significantly altered by a change in governance structure. As Truman pointed out, established groups will try to maintain the status quo.[40] Therefore, educational groups that have been influential in the past are likely continue to use the techniques they feel are the most successful. They will try to lobby decision makers in similar ways and utilize, to the extent possible, established patterns of influence. As listed previously, typical interest group behaviors include educating group members, representing the group's interests to decision makers, helping to set the governmental agenda, acting as forums for member expression, and acting as watchdogs during the implementation of governmental decisions.

If changes do occur, they will initially be small. For example, people may begin to perceive the role of interest groups differently. Group members, members of the school boards, and others may also anticipate changes in group operation and strategy as a result of the change. These constituencies may also have changing expectations regarding the future role of interest groups in educational policy setting. In general, changing perceptions of the role of educational interest groups may be attributable to a disruption in the established political equilibrium. Again, as Truman has suggested, disruptions to a system of governance may render certain interest group behaviors and patterns of influence obsolete.[41] Therefore, group members and members of the school board should anticipate changes in the way groups exert influence. James March and Johan Olsen describe a similar phenomena in their book *Rediscovering*

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[40] Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Institutions (1989). They find that when the state's framework is changing, the politics within that framework must change accordingly.[42]

In the long run, newly established patterns of influence may reflect the following changes in interest group activity First educational interest groups may shift their energies from local government officials (who appointed school board members under the old system) to school board members. This seems likely considering the new autonomy of the school board.[43] Second, educational interest groups may also take part in local school board elections by endorsing candidates and campaigning. Third, because educational interest groups will increasingly focus their energies on the school board, public debate on educational issues may increase. This outcome is observed by Tom Gais, Jack Walker and Mark Peterson in an article published in the *British Journal of Political Science* (1984). These authors find that the existence of interest groups stimulates public debate.[44]

Increased public debate on educational issues may produce a variety of outcomes: it may lead to increased conflict between opposing groups; it may create opportunities for opposing groups to reach consensus; or it might change nothing at all. Conflict between groups may occur because traditional consensus building mechanisms developed under appointed boards may not be adequate for elected governing bodies. Open conflict may break down relations between groups and powerful interests may be unwilling to compromise. Prolonged debate over educational policy's issues may obfuscate the mission of the schools. On the other hand, the existence of elected boards might stimulate interest groups to take part in public discourse and help communities to reach consensus. This type of discourse might be facilitated by creating open forums and opportunities for public comment. In either of these scenarios (conflict escalation or consensus building) increased interest group activity is likely to result in more frequent appearances by group leaders at board meeting, more petitions presented to the school board, and more aggressive lobbying on the part of group members. However, it is also possible that the change from appointed to elected boards will have no effect on group activity or on specific influence techniques.

The existence of elected school boards may also result in the creation of conflict between local governments and their school boards. This final point is related to Virginia's governmental system which requires school boards to be fiscally dependent on their local governments. Under the old appointed system, school board members were forced to have working relationships with their local government because they served at local government's

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[42] James March and Johan Olsen in Mark Petracca, *The Politics of Interests*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p. 370.

[43] Regardless of this new autonomy, school boards will continue to depend on local governements to raise tax revenues for schools.

[44] Tom Gais, Jack Walker, and Mark Peterson in Petracca, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

pleasure. Although these relationships were not always congenial, for the most part there was little open conflict. Now, with elected boards, both the board and the local government can legitimately claim to represent the wishes of the people. Situations where local governments reject budgets presented by their school boards may become difficult to resolve. Tension between school boards and local governments may one day lead to school boards with the power of taxation.

Although all of these changes are possible, specifics are difficult to predict. Interest group activity is mediated by a number of variables including: the nature of the particular issues adopted by the groups, the nature of the group's demands, the type of conflict in which the group is involved, and the resources available to the group.[45] For these reasons, the potential changes in interest group behavior outlined above are tentative at best. The next section begins to explore the validity of these suspicions by telling the story of Burden County's first school board elections. Emphasis is placed on the activity of interest groups before, during, and after the elections.

Section III

This section of the paper provides a description of Burden County and the events leading up to its first school board elections. The names used in this section have been changed to protect the identity of the community under study. Direct quotations were taken from interviews and the local newspapers.[46] The prose here is descriptive in order to provide a sense of what Burden County is like, and the events are presented in chronological order.

Burden County

Driving through Burden County, one has the sense that he is moving from the present into the past. This sense comes not because the county is backward, but because of the way it has been developed. If one enters the county from the north, the first thing one passes is a modern airport. This is the 1990s. Sophisticated passengers leave and arrive on regular schedules: many commuting to New York, or Washington, DC. Further down the highway one quickly finds the 1980s. Overdeveloped strip malls containing video stores, Wal-Marts, K-Marts, and Seven-Elevens line each side of the highway. The traffic is heavy here and it can take up to forty five minutes to traverse a short strip of road. Surprisingly, the road ends abruptly at the edge of a beautiful college campus. This is the 1950s. White trim, brick buildings, and green

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[45] John Tierney, and Kay Schlozman, in Petracca, *op.cit.*, p. 367.

[46] Newspapers are not directily cited in order to maintain the anonomity of the location. Quotations and figures can be checked by contacting the author.

grass accost the visitor. Edmund Burke University, replete with neo-classical columns and archways, reminds one of the beauty and tradition of the region.

Continuing the tour of the county, one must now drive south, east or west. In each direction there is rural countryside. This is the 1920's. Few signs of modern life are noticeable save the telephone polls and the occasional satellite dish. Here, vineyards dot the countryside and one is reminded of a more bucolic way of life. Several wealthy and famous individuals make this part of the county their home. Every once in awhile one can see a large gate leading from the road to an estate. More often, one sees modest well kept homes. Occasionally there is a trailer park, or a house in need of significant repair. Sadly, some families still live in shacks without phones or plumbing.

Touring the county—which covers over 700 square miles—gives one a good sense of its diversity. The environment includes forested hillsides and urban sprawl, and the inhabitants represent a broad range of cultures and levels of socio-economic status. As a result of this diversity, the school district must serve a variety of different communities and interests. According to a former superintendent of schools, any interest found in the United States is probably represented in Burden County.[47]

The School System

Burden's schools have a decent reputation among county residents. Test scores are average and there are few drop outs. However, like any public school system, problems do exist. Scores on the Literacy Passport Test (a test of math and English skills students in Virginia must pass in order to get a diploma) are thirty percent higher for white students than they are for black students. The mobility rate for students is forty percent — meaning four out of every ten students will move sometime during each school year. Also, the numbers of students on free and reduced lunch are rising.

During the 1995-96 school year, approximately 10,500 students are being served by Burden County Public Schools. There are two high schools, five middle schools, and fifteen elementary schools. In addition there is an alternative high school for students with disciplinary problems, a vocational education center owned in co-operation with a neighboring city, and programs for gifted and special education students.

The recent history of the school district has been turbulent. In 1985, Bill Heydt was hired as superintendent. At that time, the appointed school board was very supportive of Heydt and he was credited with bringing about many positive changes. Teachers, in particular, found his orientation toward open communication and teacher empowerment refreshing.

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[47] Quote from an article about Burden County printed in a scholarly journal, p. 252.

According to one author the board had agreed to set policy, and to leave administrative matters to Heydt. [48]

Soon, however, the orientation of the board started to change. New elections in 1989 ushered in a conservative group of county supervisors and they, in turn, appointed conservative school board members with no loyalty to Heydt. Considerable friction between the school board and Heydt developed and in 1990 he resigned. At that time many of the teachers were concerned that the gains they had made concerning autonomy and inter school collaboration would be lost.[49]

The teachers concern was well founded. Heydt's successor Nat Hawkins was hired and put an end to many of the collaborative practices the teachers started under Heydt's direction. Many administrators in the central office were dismissed and by 1993 many of the reform efforts undertaken by the teachers ceased.[50] These changes, however, did not usher in an era of amity and good fortune for the county. During 1993-94 school year Hawkins botched the budget. A 1.2 million dollar oversight in the over sixty million dollar budget caused embarrassment for the school board and strife for the superintendent. Shortly after the budget debacle, the superintendent was given a vote of no confidence by the school board and asked to resign. The current superintendent, Dr. Henry, was appointed a few months later.

The Move Toward Elected Boards

In April of 1992, prior to Dr. Henry's arrival in Burden, Virginia's General Assembly enacted legislation that gave local school divisions the option of changing from appointed school boards to elected school boards. This was a momentous change for a state that had allowed only appointed boards since 1903.[51] During elections held in 1993, many cities and towns opted for elected school boards. As a result, in May of 1994 fourteen cities and two towns had their first elections to fill a total of seventy seats.[52]

Also in 1993, seventy five county's (including Burden) voted to adopt elected school boards.[53] In Burden County, the change from appointed to elected boards was, in large part, attributable to the work of Steve Webber. Webber, who lives in the western part of the county, started gathering the signatures of 10 percent of the registered voters early in 1992. In Webber's words, "I thought then, and I still do, that the process [of appointing school board members]

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 253.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 257.
[50] *Ibid. p.* 257.
[51] David G. Brickley, "Elected Boards Would be More Responsive", *Rural Living*, (June, 1991), p. 5.
[52] Pat Cahape, "Elected School Boards in Virginia: A Progress Report", *Supplement to the Link*, (Vol. 13, No. 3), p. 1.
[53] *Ibid.*

was flawed—not because the supervisors wouldn't pick competent people, they probably picked more competent people than will be elected. The point was that this was a school board spending seventy percent of the county's budget and I say we are supposed to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people—by the people means an elected school board. . . I think we ended up with about 5,000 signatures before time ran out. We had thousands more than we needed." Webber, who is in his eighties, is known as a tax conservative. Sheila Kelly, another community member known for her conservative view point, was also involved in the effort to gather signatures.

With the referendum on the ballot, many discussions regarding the choice between elected and appointed ensued. Those opposed to elected boards had a variety of arguments supporting their point of view. First, they thought that elections would hurt minority representation. In 1991, Virginia had 18% minority representation on school boards compared to a national average of 5.5%.[54] Second, opponents feared that elected board members would be beholden to special interest groups who assisted in their election. This affiliation would make tasks like re-drawing attendance zones and reducing the number of teachers more difficult than they already were. Third, many community members felt that it would be difficult to find qualified individuals willing to spend the money necessary to run for office. Fourth, some felt that conflicts between elected school boards (without power of taxation) and boards of supervisors (with power of taxation) would become commonplace along with an increase in school politicization.[55]

Those in favor of elected boards appealed to community member's desire for local control and democracy. Supporters of elected boards argued that elected school board members would be more responsive to citizen demands because of their increased accountability. In addition, supporters felt that appointed boards were already rife with conflict and politics and could not be made worse.[56] In the end, those in favor of school board elections won out with 74% of the vote, and Burden County prepared for its first school board elections.

The First Election

During the fall of 1995, 367 school board seats were up for election across the state of Virginia.[57] In Burden County there were four. Burden is split into six wards: Bower, Jack Duffy, Lakeville, Webster, Dill and North View. Each district has a representative on the school board. There is also an at large member — a position traditionally filled by a minority. For the first election, the following seats were open: Webster (incumbent-Bill James), Lakeville

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[54] R. Beasley Jones, "Appointment System Needs No Fixing", *Rural Living*,, June 1991, p. 4.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] Brickley, *op. cit.*,p. 5.
[57] Cahape, *op. cit.*, p.1.

(incumbent-Todd Dorrien), Bower (incumbent-Anne Davis), and at-large (incumbent-Mike Allsup).

The Burden school board was known for its divisive character and its split votes. Often, votes were four to three reflecting a conservative majority. The seats up for election represented three of the most conservative board members (James, Dorrien, and Allsup) and a liberal one (Davis). Those remaining on the board were also split with one conservative member (Sue Morrison) and two liberal members (Tim Noole and Darleen Opfer). Prior to the election, all of the board members were white. Considering these numbers, contests for the open seats, set for November 7, 1995, had the possibility of changing the overall make-up and orientation of the board.

Responding to the proposition of school board elections, Allan Delong, a Burden County citizen and member of the Western Burden High School faculty, developed a coalition of local organizations. This coalition, started in November of 1994, had two purposes. First, it would give candidates access to citizens. Second, it would provide citizens the information they needed in order to make informed choices during the November 1995 school board elections. The idea of the coalition quickly took root and several local organizations expressed interest. By January of 1995, the Burden Education Association, the Burden County Principal's Association, the Burden County NAACP, the Burden County Democratic Party, the Burden County Republican Party, and the League of Women Voters had joined forces to create the Association for an Accountable School Board (commonly referred to as The Association). The formal goal of the organization was, "to help candidates by providing a positive environment that will encourage a campaign focused on issues. The Association will not endorse any candidates".[58] Each organization listed above held a seat on the steering committee of the Association and elected Karen Endicott (the representative from the League of Women Voters) as chair.

During this same period, the sitting board began deliberations with the county supervisors over the building of a new high school. Growth in the county had been steady over the past four years and many of the county schools were being pushed beyond their capacities. The building of a new high school would relieve overcrowding, but would also require redistricting—a contentious topic. Decisions on the details of the high school plan (i.e. location and design) would be made later in the year. Current estimates of cost were close to twenty-three million.

Early interest in school board elections were nill. March and the beginning of April saw no one come forward to file as a candidate for any of the four open seats. In an April interview with The Burden Chronicle, Endicott expressed her disappointment in the lack of candidates. She felt that the potential for high campaign costs and the invasion of privacy associated

[58] Coalition materials.

with running for office had kept people from signing up. In order to stimulate interest The Association organized an informational forum for April 21. Speakers from the Virginia School Board Association and other communities who had already held elections would talk about their experiences and how to run a campaign. To run for office candidates needed to gather the signatures of 125 registered voters before June 13.

Soon after the forum, the first brave soul to express interest in running for the board stepped forward. Her name was Tamika Hurst and she was a veteran school board member and an assistant dean at Edmund Burke University. She had served on the board in 1991 as the appointment of conservative supervisor Dave Pearl and was interested in running for the Webster district seat. Bill James, the current school board member from the Webster district was a conservative Republican aspiring to be a U.S. representative. He applauded Hurst's decision and announced her candidacy in a press conference with several local Republican politicians. Although school board elections are non-partisan, candidates are allowed to seek and accept party endorsements. Hurst did not express interest in a GOP endorsement, but Republican Party Chairman Dan Stockwell said that, " a lot of Republicans will be supporting her" Hurst also had the distinction of being black.

In the beginning of June, three more candidates stepped forward. Ruth Bernard, former member of the Gifted and Talented Advisory Board under former superintendent Hawkins and Jake Blair, a conservative community member known to be close with John Webber, both filed to run for the at-large position. In the Bower district Paul Minden, a member of the Technical Education Center Advisory Council, made public his desire to run for office.

As the June 13 deadline approached, several incumbents contemplated entering the race. Mike Allsup (at-large member) and Todd Dorrien (the current chair of the board) were both circulating petitions but had not made any official decisions. According to Allsup, people had been urging him to run in order to preserve some continuity on the board. "People do appeal to my sense of duty about it," said Allsup, "We just hired a new superintendent and . . . the new high school will require redistricting. These kind of things some feel would be better if we had some carryover." Allsup would be up for his second four year term in the at-large position. Dorrien would be trying for a third term from the Lakeville district.

Along with the incumbents, other citizens were also getting involved in the races. Greg Simpson, a chemist for Methane Products, put his name in for the at large position, while Kevin Goslin, an accountant for Stereo World, put his name in from the Webster District. Charles Thompson, the Western Burden PTA president, was also preparing a bid for the Lakeville district seat currently held by Todd Dorrien.

On June 9, just four days from the deadline, Sheila Kelly announced her intention to run for the board from the Webster district. This made the Webster contest a three way race

between Kelly, Goslin, and Hurst. Kelly, a well known Republican, had potential to split the Republican vote between herself and Hurst. However, several notable conservative figures, including supervisor Dave Pearl, pledged continued support of Hurst.

The morning of June 13 saw several last minute changes to the slate of candidates. Thompson, Dorrien and Kelly officially entered the race. Brian Miller, the adult education coordinator at the Technical Education Center and a Democrat, also entered the race. Miller, a black man, had held the at-large position several years earlier. Also in the race for member at-large was Viola Johnson, a black Baptist minister rumored to have ties to the NAACP. In the Bower race, Kirk Randall, an Edmund Burke employee, put in his name to challenge Paul Minden.

Overall, there were twelve candidates running for office in Burden's inaugural school board election. The five candidates running for the at large seat were Ruth Bernard, Jake Blair, Greg Simpson, Viola Johnson and Brian Miller. The three candidates running for the open seat in Webster were Tamika Hurst, Sheila Kelly, and Kevin Goslin. The two candidates running for the open seat in Lakeville were Todd Dorrien, and Charles Thompson. In Bower, the two candidate running for office were Paul Minden and Kirk Randall. Board chairman Todd Dorrien was the only incumbent to run for re-election.

Table 1:

Summary of Candidates and Incumbents in Burden County, Virginia

	Incumbent	Seeking Re-election	Candidates
Bower	Anne Davis	No	Minden, Randall
Jack Duffy	Darleen Opfer	No race in '95	
Lakeville	Todd Dorrien	Yes	Dorrien, Thompson
Webster	Bill James	No	Hurst, Kelly, Gosselin
Dill	Tim Noole	No race in '95	
North View	Sue Morrison	No race in '95	
At-Large	Mike Allsup	No	Bernard, Blair, Simpson, Johnson, Miller

The summer saw little activity with regard to school board elections. However, there was significant debate over the nature of the Family Life Education curriculum. Several groups in town, including the Burden Pregnancy Center (a pro-life organization), wanted parents to have the option of opting their children out of the schools family life education program and providing them with an abstinence based curriculum called "Teen Aid". The Board policy did allow students to opt out, but instead of taking "Teen Aid" students were required to do other

work on health related issues such as smoking or heart disease. Those that supported the current policy such as Planned Parenthood (a pro choice organization), BPPA (Burden Pregnancy Prevention Association), and the Burden Education Association felt that changing the policy set a bad precedent by creating a "menu" of curricular options simply to appease the complaints of a vocal minority. Those in favor of the change argued that Family Life was a special issue in need of special consideration.

The split between groups on the Family Life issue was also apparent on the board. Bill James (incumbent-Webster) said that he didn't understand the problem with giving parents choices. James is quoted as saying "I'm uncomfortable with the idea of saying to parents that you can have any flavor you want as long as its vanilla. . . The idea that somehow if we're going to study family life [then] we have to do it from one perspective . . . is odd to me." On the other end of the continuum Darleen Opfer (incumbent-Jack Duffy) expressed concern about children not taking Family Life. She said, "Children are out there thinking that salt in the belly button will prevent pregnancy . . . that two students can share birth control pills." A vote on whether or not to change the policy from its present form to a more flexible arrangement was split four to three. James's side persevered in creating an opportunity for students opting out of family life to take Teen Aid.

The Race Continues

On August 18, shortly after entering the race Tamika Hurst(candidate-Webster), citing family illness, and Kirk Randall(candidate-Bower), expressing concerns about the time required for board activities, stepped out of the race. These changes reduced the Webster race to two, and the Bower race to one. The ten remaining candidates began to campaign and debate local issues. This process was facilitated by The Association, who developed a survey asking candidates their position on a variety of educational issues ranging from school choice to prayer in school.

Only one candidate, Jake Blair,(candidate-at-large) chose not to participate in the survey stating that he was not comfortable with the format because it restricted his answers. Sheila Kelly did fill out the survey but left a majority of the questions blank. Notebooks with candidate responses to the Association's questions were made available to Association members and placed in the school and public libraries across the county. Copies of the responses were released to the press in portions in order to generate a string of articles. The general public could purchase a copy of the candidates answers at cost, although few private citizens did.

In addition to the surveys, The Association was also planning a series of public forums where candidates would be asked to answer several of the survey questions in public. The format of the forums was similar to a debate, although it gave citizens, in the words of the

Burden Chronicle, a chance to get answers to their questions, "in the candidates' own words — uncut, uncensored and ready for public inspection." Five forums would be held for the at-large position and eight additional forums would be held for the district positions.

The Republican Party, following the Association's lead, invited the ten school board candidates to speak at its quarterly meeting in September. Committee chair, Dan Stockwell, asked each candidate to make a brief platform statement and answer the questions of those in attendance. In a letter inviting the candidates Stockwell wrote, "any past or present connection you may have to either political party has no bearing on our desire to hear from you. As a party we have not endorsed anyone, and have not decided if we will do so at all." The Republican party met on September 7, and the first at-large forum was scheduled for September 12.

At the first at-large forum there were about fifty people in attendance. Candidates were asked questions regarding their views on the current direction of school programs, curriculum, and their stance toward students with special needs. Miller, and Bernard supported the continuation of "special" programs for special needs students while Blair and Simpson re-framed the issue in terms of success for all students. Simpson came out as a proponent of ability grouping while Johnson and others did not express specific opinions on the subject.

Throughout the series of at-large forums each candidate expressed different view points. Miller supported vocational education and the creation of a "Road Map" for students to navigate the educational system. Simpson voiced support for stricter discipline and criticized the foreign exchange program. Blair expressed concerns regarding the lack of strategic planning and means of assessing progress toward goals. Johnson was concerned about redistricting and the school board's method of handling appeals from the public. Bernard indicated that she supported the continuation of gifted education and the implementation of challenging curriculum.

Forums held for the district races also exhibited a variety of view points. In the Webster race, Sheila Kelly(candidate-Webster) expressed interest in removing "affective" education from the school curriculum, while Steve Goslin voiced support for school counselors and praised the schools for doing a good job. In the middle of September, Doug Painter, a PTO president, presented himself as a write in candidate for the Bower district. His views were similar to those of Paul Minden(candidate-Bower) except he felt that all of the schools should have there own vocational program; Minden(write in-Bower) supported a more centralized approach. In the Lakeville district Todd Dorrien, the sitting board Chairman, expressed his support for the teaching of creationism (as a science), his disdain for sex education that included information regarding AIDS and contraception, and his negative feeling toward school counselors who, in his opinion, weakened the traditional mechanisms that held families together. Charles Thompson (candidate-Lakeville), on the other hand, expressed an interest in

increasing support for guidance counselors and the teaching of creationism as an aspect of a comparative religions class.

The forums effectively elucidated the positions of the candidates. Christopher Jones, the local coordinator of the Burden Education Association, said he felt the forums were meant to give voters the opportunity to get to know the candidate so they would not elect "stealth candidates" — those considered to vote according to a very specific set of values that are not announced during the campaign. Although no one appeared to be a stealth candidate, several of the candidates did receive support from local groups. For example, Brian Miller(candidate-at-large)received money from the Democratic Party and made several campaign appearances with other influential Democrats. Officially, however, Miller did not receive endorsement. Similarly, Charlie Simpson(candidate-at-large) received money from the Republican Party but no formal endorsement. The NAACP supported Viola Johnson, but again without endorsement. For the most part, the groups participating in The Association refrained from making endorsements as they had promised. One exception to the no endorsement policy was the Burden Education Association (BEA). Although the association itself did not endorse any candidates, the political action organization tied to the BEA did. The BEA's political action committee endorsed Brian Miller, Steve Goslin, and Paul Minden.

The Mainstream Education Coalition was another group involved in the election process. This group's membership overlapped significantly with The Association's. However, the Education Coalition had explicit goals relating to the school board elections. They were concerned about stealth candidates, preservation of the separation between church and state, and the maintenance of sex education programs that included information about contraception and AIDS. This group, using the questionnaires written by the Association, publicized the differences between the candidates on these issues. For example, members of the Education Coalition would attend the forums with prepared sets of questions centering on church state issues and sex education. Members were concerned about the intrusion of fundamentalist groups into public education. One such group, the Christian Coalition, formed a local chapter as recently as October, 1995.

Table 2:

Summary of Educational Interest Groups in Burden County, Virginia*

Democratic Party
Republican Party
League of Women Voters
NAACP
Burden Education Association
Burden Principals Association

The Association for an Accountable School Board
Mainstream Education Coalition
Christian Coalition
Planned Parent Hood
Burden Pregnancy Prevention Council
Burden Pregnancy Center

* These are not arranged in any special order.

The Race Concludes

The elections were quickly approaching and the candidates were trying differentiate themselves from each other. Jake Blair, running in the at large race began to publicly criticize the current school board and the way it was designing the new high school. Blair believed that a study commissioned by the school board to determine the value of creating an energy efficient building was poorly spent. He also felt that funding decisions for the new high school were made in the "heat of the moment" and would not stand up to scrutiny. In a school board meeting Blair told the board that they were buying a "pig in a polk". None of the other at-large candidates criticized the high school plans.

In the Webster race, ideological differences between Goslin and Kelly became more apparent. For example, Sheila Kelly made several public statement denouncing "critical thinking" and "diversity". She is quoted in the Burden Chronicle as saying, "I see the making us aware of all the diversity of beliefs and ways of doing things as the division of the people by a united method." In forums and interviews, Kelly often mentioned the "educational bureaucracy" as being overly powerful. Her opponent, Steve Goslin had different views. He felt that cultural diversity was a strength in a shrinking world and a global economy. Instead of being a critic, Goslin saw himself as a "cheerleader" for the public schools.

Differences between Dorrien and Thompson apparent form the forums also crescendoed. Dorrien came out in favor of school choice and vouchers. He felt the GI Bill set the precedent for using public dollars in public or private institutions. Quoting scripture Dorrien likened the school to a man running a race, "Strong people don't fear competition", Dorrien said, "it's those who have gone flabby and are out of shape that are worried that if a little competition comes along, it may put them out of business, so they might lose the race." He also said he would reduce funding to at-risk programs because some programs, aimed at helping children from troubled homes, infringed on parental responsibilities. Thompson, on the other hand, based his campaign on the slogan, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." His message stressed team work and public input as solutions to many of the schools problems.

The week leading up to the elections was fraught with last minute efforts to distribute flyers and campaign materials. The Burden Chronicle ran several editorials by county residents in support of various candidates. On November 5, just two days before the election, the Mainstream Education group started to run adds that targetted the conservative candidates. The adds read,

> Attention Voters in Lakeville and Webster - School board races in these districts offer clear opportunities to elect candidates who respect the Constitutional separation of church and state. Government neutrality towards religion has allowed both civil liberties and religious liberties to flourish in the United States.
>
> Mainstream Education Coalition urges you to VOTE FOR FREEDOM on November 7. vote for candidates committed to maintaining the SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE in Burden County.

	Lakeville		Webster	
	C. Thomp- son	vs. T. Dorrien	K. Goslin	vs. S. Kelly
Supports reality based Family Life Ed.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Supports access to guidance counselors	Yes	Academic advice only	Yes	No response available
Supports public funds staying in public schools (no vouchers)	Yes	Declined phone response	Yes	No
Supports evolution, not creationism in science curriculum	Yes	No	Yes	Evolution as theory, creationism as fact
Supports student prayer remaining private (no teacher-led prayers)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

No other adds of this type were run in the paper, although Dr. Painter(write-in-Bower) and Viola Johnson(candidate-at-large) both purchased advertisements.

November 7 was a busy day at the polls. Over 16,000 votes were cast in the at large race, and over 6,000 in the district races. In each of the four school board races "liberal" candidates won. Brian Miller won the at large seat with 5,788 votes, while Charlie Simpson was runner up with 4,158. The other candidates, Johnson, Bernard and Blair, received 3,537 , 2,170, and 862 votes respectively. In the Webster race Goslin nudged ahead of Kelly 1,546 to 1,450. Bower saw Minden beat Orr 2,334 to 1,442.

Table 3:

Summary of November Election Results for Burden County, Virginia

	Incumbent	Seeking Re-election	Candidates
Bower	Anne Davis	No	Minden (W), Painter (L)
Jack Duffy	Darleen Opfer	No race in '95	
Lakeville	Todd Dorrien	Yes	Dorrien (L), Thompson (W)
Webster	Bill James	No	Kelly(L), Gosselin(W)
Dill	Tim Noole	No race in '95	
North View	Sue Morrison	No race in '95	
At-Large	Mike Allsup	No	Bernard(L), Blair (L), Simpson (L) Johnson (L), Miller (W)

W = Win, L=Loss

Section IV

The story of Burden's school board elections provides several good examples of interest group involvement at the local level. This section analyzes a few of the examples taken from the previous section. First, it shows the number of groups that interact at the local level over educational concerns. Second, it provides examples of group formation which reinforce Truman's understanding of institutional equilibrium. Third, it illustrates the role of interest groups in converting citizen demands into policy outputs. Finally, the section illustrates how elections act as access channels to school policy making. Overall, interest groups are shown to behave in expected ways. Interviews with group members indicate their belief that elected boards will be more responsive to their demands. As a result of this belief, groups predict heavier interest group involvement in school governance in the near future. Recent debate in Burden over balancing the educational budget may lend further support for these conclusions.

The groups discussed in the previous section are a cross section of the groups involved in educational governance. Many of the major political groupings are mentioned: The Republican Party, The Democratic Party, The NAACP, The League of Women Voters, The Burden Education Association (BEA), and The Burden Principals Association (BPA). In addition, PTO's, The Association For a Accountable School Board, and the Mainstream Education Coalition are also mentioned as players in the political arena. Hints of other groups such as a taxpayer's association, the religious right, and the school district administration itself are also evident.

According to Frederick Wirt and Michael Kirst, school interest groups, such as those mentioned in the preceding section, can be classified into several categories. Distinctions are based on whether the groups view education as an end, or as a means to other ends.[59] Those groups in the first category are usually made up of professional educators interested in professional issues. Those in the second category are interested in ideological issues such as taxes, patriotism, or morality.[60] In this case, the first category would apply to the BEA, the BPA, PTO's, and the school administration. The second category contains groups whose interests transcend the schools. These groups are interested in guarding certain values and community norms. These groups include the Democratic and Republican political parties, the NAACP, and the League of Women Voters. A third category of interest groups is "crisis" groups. These groups are closely related to the latent groups discussed section two. Crisis groups often form quickly due to pressing issues, and then disband. The Association for a Accountable School Board and the Mainstream Education Coalition can both be considered in this category. The other groups mentioned (a tax-payers association and the religious right) are considered to be latent because little evidence of their existence could be found except for informant's perceptions of their importance in the community.

Of these groups the Mainstream Education Coalition provides an excellent example of Truman's theory of equilibrium in institutions. As explained in section two, Truman believed that groups, latent or extent, established consistent patterns of interaction which could be considered as a state of equilibrium. In Burden, under the appointed system of school governance, such a system existed. Many group members interviewed expressed knowledge of what to expect from each other and a general sense of how things worked. For example, the head of the BEA, felt that he had a good working relationship with the school administration and could count on them for information.

Part of the overall equilibrium rested on citizens perception of appointed boards as being open -minded. The switch from appointed to elected boards caused people to question whether or not their perception of the school board would be appropriate for elected boards. The change caused a disruption in the normal pattern of governance because people did not know what to expect. According to Truman, groups placed at a disadvantage due to a disruption often attempt to restore the previous balance. In this case, a latent community group was moved to action. The latent group consisted of community members who favored the secular nature of public education and feared that elections would bring "stealth" candidates. The formation of the Mainstream Education Coalition, a group strongly in favor of the separation between

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[59] Frederick Wirt and Michael Kirst, *The Politics of Education, Schools in Conflict*, (Berkely, CA: McCutheon, 1989), pp. 93-103.

[60] *Ibid.*

church and state, was a move to restore a perceived imbalance caused by the switch to school board elections. This explanation for the formation of the Mainstream Coalition is a further articulation of the "crisis" argument developed above.

As an important aside, it is interesting to note the importance of perceived disadvantage in the formation of the Mainstream group. Although a branch of the Christian Coalition did form in Burden County during the school board campaign, interviews with other groups and school board members revealed no strong religious right organization in Burden. Most group members talked about the religious right as a powerful force in the community but could not identify any specific group or organization as the source of that power. It was the shared perception of a powerful religious right that motivated the members of the Mainstream Mainstream to action. As Wirt and Kirst state, "in politics what is important is what citizens think is reality — not reality."[61]

The Mainstream group acted as a conversion process in the political environment. The group was acting as a conversion process by helping to translate citizen demand into policy outcomes. According to David Easton, this political arrangement can be considered a "system". A political systems represents the process through which groups compete for allocation of resources and the legitimization of their values.[62] In Easton's model there is dynamic interplay between all of the sub systems in a society. The system of local educational governance, for example, is one of a number of overlapping subsystems including the courts, the welfare and the family. The interrelationship between systems in Easton's model creates stresses which, in turn, generate inputs into the system such as support (e.g. tax dollars) and demands (e.g. the desire for a separation between church and state). In response, the political system generates outputs in the form of policy. Outputs which value certain beliefs over others create new stresses which circulate through the system in a recursive loop.[63]

There is both a horizontal and a vertical dimension to systems analysis. The horizontal dimension occurs on one level of government — local, state or national — where supports and demands generated on one level are converted into outputs on that same level. An example of a horizontal conversion is local propert tax being spent on local schools. In the vertical dimension, supports and demands are transferred from one level to another. An example of this type of transer occurs when federal regulations for handicapped access results in ramps being built at local schools. When national and state interests utilize their influence to affect local decisions local autonomy is constricted. This practice leads to what is sometimes called "sandbox" government.[64] In the horizontal dimension local interest groups press for local outputs.

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[61] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[62] David Easton in Frederick Wirt and Michael Kirst, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[63] Wirt and Kirst, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-44.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Many aspects of the formation of The Association for an Accountable School Board mirror those of the Mainstream Education Coalition. However, The Association, being made up of members from other groups with conflicting values, tempered its view point. Other groups also served in the conversion process between citizen-demand and policy-output. Although their roles are not described in detail here, some of the election results indicate their success. For example, all of the candidates endorsed by the BEA won their races. Of equal interest is the that the two candidates in the at-large race associated with the Democratic and Republican parties received the most votes. The third highest vote-getter was associated with the NAACP. In the Webster race events were similar. Kelly, a Republican, was only a few hundred votes short of Simpson who espoused largely Democratic ideologies.

Another conversion process in the systems framework is elections themselves. Groups provide channels of access to government year around, but elections provide access on a periodic basis. Wirt and Kirst describe elections as arroyos — water channels used in the South West to channel occasional floods. Elections for school boards are similar to arroyos in that they are an underutilized system. Turnout for school board elections is generally dismal and races feature few differences between candidates.[65] Occasionally, however, as Iannaconne and Lutz point out, elections are rancorous.[66] They describe these short bursts of intense activity as displays of dissatisfaction. In between these eruptions, school board politics are generally placid. According to Iannaconne and Lutz, the bursts of activity come when the values of the board have strayed to far from the beliefs of "mainstream" citizens. During active elections incumbents are likely to be voted out and superintendents replaced. "Throwing the rascals out" symbolizes the reconnection of the school board to the people. In many ways the first election in Burden flooded the arroyos. Only one incumbent ran for re-election and he was defeated. The character of the board changed significantly, and the balance of power shifted form a four to three conservative edge to a six to one liberal mandate.

Elections and interest groups serve as two major avenues for citizen input in local educational governance. Discussions with interest group members and members of the school board indicate that although interest group behavior appears to be similar to what it has been in the past, there have been some changes. The most significant of these changes is the perception that the school board will be more responsive to group demands. This feeling was shared by the BEA, BPA, BPPA, Planned Parenthood, and the Mainstream Education Coalition. This, however, was not a universally held belief. Several groups such as the Burden Pregnancy Center and the Christian Coalition felt that the true power in the school system was, and continues to be, held by the school administration. This finding shows the victorious

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[65] Zeigler, Jennings, and Peak, *op. cit.* pp. 36-37.
[66] Iannacocone and Lutz, *op. cit.*, pp. ix -x.

"liberal" groups enjoying their newly found dominance, and the "conservative" groups bemoaning the "educational establishment". Most groups feel that there will be more group involvement in upcoming decisions and elections. "Next time," a member of BPPA stated, "we probably, won't catch the conservatives with their pants down again."

Early indicators suggest that interest groups are becoming increasingly involved in local elections and decision making, although it is too early to make formal conclusions regarding the activity of interest groups in relation to changing political systems. This paper illustrates the complexity of local educational politics and the dynamic interplay between system demands and outputs. It also illustrates that interest groups may be one of the most common forms of participation in school governance apart from elections. Politicization, therefore, as an outcome of this participation, should not be feared, but understood in the context of the political process. To close, it is evident that more time is needed to understand the role of school board elections in moderating the behavior of local interest groups.

Appendix

As explained in the previous sections, the purpose of this paper is to increase our understanding of the activity of special interest groups at the local level. The study investigated local interest groups and their involvement during the shift from an appointed to an elected school board. The following aspects of the studies design are addressed in this section: (1) location (2) type of data (3) method of data collection (4) selection of informants and (5) data analysis.

Location of Study

The choice of location for this study was relatively simple. Because the study focuses on changes in the activity of local interest groups following the switch from appointed to elected school boards, a community going through this change served as the focus of the study. Virginia is a perfect state for studying interest group behavior under changing political conditions because many communities are making this change.[67] Although it would have been desirable to study all of the communities in the state adopting elected boards, limited resources made this impossible. In order to narrow the scope of the research, one community was chosen as the focus of a detailed case study.

The community under study was chosen because it belongs to one of the eight Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's) in the state.[68] It is a populous community and typical of other large communities in the state. Typical, as it is used here, means that the community is similar to others based on a variety of demographic measures taken from U.S. and Virginia governmental studies. The community chosen is in the top 20% of all Virginia communities on the following measures: population, geographic area, number of families, and number of children in school.[69]

Type of Data

For this study personal accounts of interest group activity were used to indicate stability or change in interest group activity. This choice is consistent with the political perspective of the study: a perspective that treats school systems and communities as dynamic political entities. According to Samuel Bachrach, political entities are made up of political actors with needs, objectives, and strategies which they use to achieve their objectives. Within political entities coalitions of actors emerge which identify objectives, and devise strategies to achieve those objectives. The activities of groups are constrained by organizational structure, technology, and ideologies.[70] In this case, individual's perceptions (the testimony of group members, and other political actors) are used to characterize groups, their activities, and their relationship to other groups in the political system.

Method of Data Collection

Individual perceptions of interest group behavior can be studied in several ways. Possible techniques range from surveys to one-on-one interviews. Surveys, for example, often try to sample a population, identify the sample's perceptions, and then generalize about the perceptions of the entire population. This type of research is usually of a topical nature and does not probe the depths of people's awareness. Interviewing, on the other hand, has the potential to reveal deeper understandings of the phenomena in question and was the technique employed in this study. During interviews people are often able to report on subtle occurrences that can not easily be detected by other more "objective" means such as tests, Likert Scales, or simple yes/no answers. According to Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992), interviewing, more than other techniques, allows the researcher to hear explanations and predictions of

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[68] An MSA is an area with a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that are socially and economically integrated with that nucleus.Virginia Statistical Abstract, 1994-95 edition, Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, p. 569.

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 146-148, 419-421, 577-579, 604-606.

[70] Samuel Bacharach, *Organizational Behavior in Schools and School Districts*, (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p 23.

future behavior.[71] Due to the unique value of the interview technique, interviewing was chosen as the preferred data collection method.

Study Participants

Choosing interviewing as the data gathering technique created the need to select community members for interviews. Community members were selected for interviews by asking individuals such as the school superintendent, school board members, government officials, and other individuals considered to be knowledgeable concerning interest group activity to provide the names of local educational interest groups and the key people involved in them. this is sometimes referred to as reputational analysis. These individuals, along with current school board members, recently defeated school board members, and recent school board candidates made up the pool of potential informants for the study. Interviewing ceased when the information provided by informants became repetitive.

Data Analysis

Interviews for this study were taped and transcribed. Transcriptions, newspaper clippings, and board minutes were studied in order to identify themes and issues. Evidence, both supporting and contradicting, the authors point of view was identified and summarized. Interpretation of the data was discussed with a peer debriefer. Several practices such as member checking and the triangulation of responses were followed to insure the trustworthiness of the data.

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[71] Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers,* (White Plains, NY: Longmnan Publishing, 1992), p. 65.